Bistamiana
Author(s): A. J. Arberry
Source: *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London*, Vol. 25, No. 1/3 (1962), pp. 28-37
Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of School of Oriental and African Studies
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/610774
Accessed: 04/09/2010 03:02

BISTAMIANA

By A. J. Arberry

IN his interesting and provocative book *Hindu and Muslim mysticism* (Athlone Press, 1960), Professor R. C. Zaehner has discussed at length the part which he believes Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī played in introducing Vedāntin ideas into Muslim mysticism. In this paper it is proposed to re-examine some of the crucial texts upon which this theory has been based.

1

khud'a = māyā ?

In al-Sarrāj's *Kitāb al-Luma'* (p. 384 of R. A. Nicholson's edition = p. 464 of the Cairo 1960 edition) a famous account is given, in Abū Yazīd's own words, of a ' flight into eternity '. Professor Zaehner translates this passage as follows :

> ' As soon as I reached [God's] unity ' [he says], ' I became a bird whose body was of oneness and whose wings were of everlastingness, and I went on flying in the atmosphere of relativity for ten years until I entered into an atmosphere a hundred million times as large ; and I went on flying until I reached the expanse of eternity and in it I saw the tree of oneness '. Then [says Sarrāj], he described the soil [in which it grew] its root and branch, its shoots and fruits, and then he said ' Then I looked, and I knew that all this was deceit '.[1]

[1] Zaehner, *HMM*, 95 ; cf. *Mysticism, sacred and profane*, 163. Z. has made some minor changes in his previous version of this passage, but inaccuracies still remain. The phrase ' As soon as I reached [God's] unity ' (earlier, ' As soon as I attained to His unity ') represents the Arabic أوّل ما صرت الى وحدانيته. The adverbial أوّل ما means ' the first time that ' (see Gaudefroy-Demombynes and R. Blachère, *Grammaire de l'arabe classique*, 284 ; Massignon, *Essai*, 248 translates more correctly, ' Dès que j'allais à Son unicité '), and صرت here has the meaning ' I pursued a course that brought me to ' (Lane, *Lexicon*, I, 1754). (In his version of this story Farīd al-Dīn 'Aṭṭār was also inaccurate when he rendered, *Tadhkirat al-auliyā'*, I, 175, چون بوحدانيت رسيدم ; but this is not his only inaccuracy, as will be seen below.) The narrative is of a journey to God's pure essence (for *waḥdāniya* see Massignon, *Essai*, 59, 285), the first stage of which was Abū Yazīd's ten years' flight through the phenomenal world (*hawā' al-kaifiya* ; for the technical meaning of *kaif* and *kaifiya* see al-Jurjānī, *al-Ta'rīfāt* (Cairo, 1938), 165–6) ; the ' atmosphere of *kaifiya* ' is ' conditioned ' being ; cf. J. W. Sweetman, *Islam and Christian theology*, I, i, 103, 116. The second stage of the journey was through a like ' atmosphere ' a hundred million times as extensive (presumably the immaterial as contrasted with the physical universe, the *malakūt*, cf. al-Sahlajī, *al-Nūr*, p. 111), at the end of which Abū Yazīd found himself in (note the change from صرت الى to صرت فى, and see Lane, loc. cit.) the arena (*maidān*, the open space outside the city of God ; thus, rather than Z.'s ' expanse ') of eternity-without-beginning (*azaliya*). It is incidentally noteworthy that the phrase وكان أوّل لحظة الى التوحيد (so printed in Badawī's edition of al-Sahlajī, p. 116, and translated by Z., *HMM*, 214 as ' and that was the first glimpse of union ' ; cf. also 'Aṭṭār, *TA*, I, 175, translated by Z., *HMM*, 215) appears in the older and more authoritative *Kitāb al-Luma'* of al-Sarrāj, loc. cit., as forming part of al-Junaid's commentary on Abū Yazīd's أوّل ما صرت الى وحدانيته with the important variant reading فذاك أوّل لحظه الى التوحيد.

Professor Zaehner comments: 'This tree seems to be none other than the cosmic tree of the *Kaṭha* Upaniṣad and the Bhagavad-Gītā. Abū Yazīd is represented as describing the soil from which it grew, its roots, branches, shoots, and fruit, but Sarrāj does not tell us how he described them. The Gītā, however, does describe them, root, branches, shoots and all. . . . Thus we can be fairly certain that when Sarrāj says that Abū Yazīd described "its root and branch, its shoots and fruits", he described these in accordance with the original.[1] This is already striking, but there is more to it than this, for this selfsame tree appears in the *Muṇḍaka* and *Śvetāśvatara* Upaniṣads, and in the latter case it is brought into connexion with *māyā* . . .'.

After quoting in translation his proof-text, Professor Zaehner goes on to identify *māyā* with the Arabic *khud'a*, which he has translated 'deceit'. '*Māyā*', he argues, 'also means "deceit", and this is precisely how Abū Yazīd describes his own tree of oneness. The Arabic word *khud'a* is in fact an exact and literal translation of the Sanskrit *māyā* which both means "deceit" and God's mysterious power by which he creates'. Professor Zaehner recites Monier-Williams on the various meanings of *māyā*, and Lane on the connotations of *khud'a*. Finally he concludes: 'The two words could scarcely correspond more exactly. Moreover, to the best of my knowledge, the world is not described as *khud'a* in any other Ṣūfī text, it does not come naturally and only makes sense if it is seen to be a translation of *māyā*. When the Ṣūfīs speak of the unreality of the world, they speak of it as a dream, or a game, not as deceit'.[2]

It is not intended to discuss here the identification of Abū Yazīd's 'tree'; suffice it to remark that there appears to be at least some grounds for supposing it to be rather the famous Tree of Life so familiar in Jewish and Muslim literature.[3] I am not qualified to express any opinion on the exact meaning or meanings of the Sanskrit *māyā*, and will confine my observations to the significance in its present context of the Arabic *khud'a*.

The term *khud'a* is admittedly non-Qur'anic; but God is described as *khādi'* in Qur'ān IV, 141, just as He is called the supreme *mākir* in III, 47, VIII, 30; God is credited with *kaid* in VII, 182, LXVIII, 45. The picture of Allah

[1] Zaehner, *HMM*, 96. The alleged 'original' reads: 'With roots above and branches below the imperishable fig-tree has been declared. Its leaves are the Vedic hymns. Whoso knows it knows the Veda. Below and above extend its branches nourished by the qualities, and the objects of sense are their sprouts. Below are extended the roots from which arise actions in the world of men'. A strange description indeed for a Muslim to borrow in speaking of the Tree of Unity!

[2] Zaehner, *HMM*, 97.

[3] For the very ancient antecedents of the Tree of Life, see Widengren's monograph in *Uppsala Universitets Årsskrift*, 1950. Prime candidate for identification in a Muslim context is obviously the 'Lote-tree of the Boundary', farthest point reached by Muhammad in his *mi'rāj*; for which see, *inter alia*, the commentaries on Qur'ān LIII, 14, and the details there given of its 'root and branch, its shoots and fruits', especially the description that it is 'the limit of the knowledge of all men, both the former and the latter ones'. The Sidra is the terminus also of Ibn 'Arabī's *mi'rāj*, see his *Kitāb al-Isrā'* (Hyderabad, 1948), 34. G. Widengren argues a Shī'ite source for Abū Yazīd's *mi'rāj* (see *UUÅ*, 1955, 89–93).

as a master of guile and cunning in His dealings with men is too familiar to require embroidering. It is part of His plan to ' try ' and ' test ' His creatures, to prove the true quality of their faith and worship; the term *balā'* occurs frequently enough both in the Qur'ān and in Ṣūfī literature.[1]

As for Professor Zaehner's remark that ' the world is not described as *khud'a* in any other Ṣūfī text ' : I would refer to two passages in the *Kitāb al-Fanā'* of al-Junaid, of which Professor Zaehner offers a new translation in Appendix B of this same book. The first reads[2]: أكادنى وعنه بى خدعنى. This is rendered by Professor Zaehner (the subject is God), ' He beguiled and deluded me through my own self away from him '. Here we have a very celebrated Ṣūfī indeed attributing to God the quality of *khud'a*, the ' delusion ' in this instance being that of existing as a discrete individual apart from God. The second passage reads[3]:

وإنما جرت سنة البلاء على أهل البلاء من ههنا حتى جاذبوا وأقاموا ولم ينخدعوا أقيم عليهم ما محقهم فى نفس القوة وعلو المرتبة وشرف النسبة.

Professor Zaehner translates : ' It is only at this point that the law of suffering comes into operation for those who are adapted to it. They lend themselves to the attractive power of God, persist, and refuse to be beguiled, and that which had obliterated them in omnipotence itself—an exalted station and a noble relationship—continues with them '.[4] In this context al-Junaid clearly establishes the divine *khud'a* as part of the ' law ' of *balā'*.

[1] The phrase وإنّما جرت سنّة البلاء على اهل البلاء in al-Junaid's *Kitāb al-Fanā'* (ed. A. Abdul Kader in *Islamic Quarterly*, I, 2, 1954, 81) has been translated by Professor Zaehner as ' It is only at this point that the law of suffering comes into operation for those who are adapted to it ' (*HMM*, 222). The word *balā'* in this and similar contexts means not so much ' suffering ' as ' trial ' ; the phrase *ahl al-balā'* means ' the people chosen by God for His trial and testing ' (Zaehner, *HMM*, 223, translates it ' the mystics who accept suffering ' which puts the shoe on the wrong foot). For the Ṣūfī understanding of *balā'* see Hujwirī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb* (tr. R. A. Nicholson), 388–9 : ' By *balā* (affliction) they signify the probation of the bodies of God's friends by diverse troubles and sicknesses and tribulations. . . . *Balā* is the name of a tribulation, which descends on the heart and body of a true believer and which is really a blessing. . . . The degree of *balā* is more honourable than that of *imtiḥān*, for *imtiḥān* affects the heart only, whereas *balā* affects both the heart and the body and is thus more powerful '. The source is of course Qur'anic, cf. e.g. XXI, 36, and see Lane, *Lexicon*, I, 256 ; cf. also al-Kharrāz, *Kitāb al-Ṣidq* (my edition), 68. (Incidentally, al-Kharrāz, op. cit., 8, is an older source for the famous *ḥadīth* quoted by Zaehner, *HMM*, 110, for which he knows no more ancient authority than al-Junaid ; see further Massignon, *Essai*, 106–7.)

[2] *IQ*, I, 2, 1954, 79. The form أكاد is not recorded in the native lexicons as a derivative of the root *kyd* ; but see Dozy, *Supplément*, II, 504, where the form is given as meaning ' irritate '. Dr. Abdul Kader's remark (*IQ*, I, p. 83, n. 3) that it ' literally means " desired me " ' is not quite correct ; أكاد from the root *kwd* is also not recorded.

[3] *IQ*, I, 2, 1954, 81.

[4] Zaehner, *HMM*, 222. Abdul Kader translates (*IQ*, I, 2, 1954, 86) : ' It is only after this stage has been achieved that it is possible for the worshipper to experience the " testing time " ; he struggles and prevails and is faithful to God and then he is conquered by that which obliterates him, that same strength, that elevated spiritual stage, that noble relationship with God '. The

In the first of the two passages just cited there is a correlation between the *kaid* and the *khud'a* of God. To complete the trinity of synonyms, we later find al-Junaid speaking of the divine *makr*[1]: فإذا كان ذلك أحاط بهم المكر من حيث لا يعلمون (Z.: 'When this happens, it is God's guile that encompasses them in a manner they do not understand').[2]

It is surely no far step from al-Junaid describing the sense of individual existence apart from God as a *khud'a*, to Abū Yazīd calling a *khud'a* the whole of existence apart from God. And if, which is a large presupposition, no other Ṣūfī followed Abū Yazīd in calling the world precisely a *khud'a*, one can at any rate cite a verse attributed to 'Umar Khaiyām in which the universe is described as 'a sleep and a dream, a deceit and a delusion'.[3]

It is suggested, then, that so far from Abū Yazīd's phrase 'and I knew that all this was deceit' being 'simply unintelligible unless viewed against a Hindu Vedāntin background',[4] it is perfectly clear and natural regarded as a mystic's extension of the Qur'anic picture of God as the supreme beguiler.

2

subḥānī

Professor Zaehner observes: 'Perhaps of all the sayings of Abū Yazīd that shocked his pious contemporaries, the most shocking was *subḥānī, mā a'ẓama sha'nī*, "Glory be to me, how great is my glory". It is very possible, however, that Abū Yazīd never went further than to say *subḥānī*, which is all that Sarrāj records, while Sahlajī reports no less than three versions of this particular logion, and it is therefore probable that the second phrase is in each case a gloss. Besides "How great is my glory" we also have "How great is my sovereignty (*sulṭānī*)", and, more striking still, "I am the Lord Most High",

sunna of *balā'* means of course God's invariable rule of testing and proving men; see p. 30, n. 1, above, and for this use of *sunna* see Qur'ān XXXIII, 38, 62, XXXV, 41, 42, XL, 85, XLVIII, 23. The word جاذبوا is unexpected, and one is tempted to emend it to جاهدوا; but if the reading is correct, Z.'s translation 'they lend themselves to the attractive power of God' is somewhat bizarre, considering that the word means 'to contend with in drawing'; the idea here would appear to be that those being tested contend with their afflictions which threaten to draw them away from God. Further comment on the edition and the two versions of the fundamental *Kitāb al-Fanā'* is reserved for a future paper.

[1] *IQ*, I, 2, 1954, 62.

[2] Zaehner, *HMM*, 223. The phrase من حيث لا يعلمون is a quotation from Qur'ān VII, 181: 'And those who deny Our revelations—step by step We lead them on from whence they know not' (Pickthall). Clearly al-Junaid had this text in mind, with its reference to God's *istidrāj*, a term with which the Ṣūfīs were very familiar; see for instance Hujwirī (tr. Nicholson), 224.

[3] ACB 20 (= Mahfuz 77, Rosen 56 with variants):

احوال جهان وبلكه گیتی یکسر   خوابی و خیالی وفریبی ودمیست

For فریب = خدعه, see *Farhang-i Nafīsī*, IV, 2557–8:

فریب: عشوه و مکر و غافل شدگی از روی خدعه و غافل کردگی بطور خدعه الخ.

[4] Zaehner, *HMM*, 97.

the last of which is also reported as a separate saying. Now *subḥānī*, " Glory be to me ", is absolutely blasphemous to Muslim ears, and nothing remotely comparable is recorded of any of the Ṣūfīs who preceded Abū Yazīd, and once again we find the explanation of it in a Hindu source : for the Sanskrit equivalent of these words occurs in the *Bṛhatsannyāsa* Upaniṣad, where we read *mahyam eva namo namaḥ*, " Homage, homage to me ".' [1]

I am not qualified to determine whether the Sanskrit word translated by Professor Zaehner as 'homage' has in fact any correspondence in meaning with the Arabic *subḥān*, but I would have thought that the similarity was somewhat remote. It is not necessary to quote the lengthy dictionary explanations of the grammatical formation and signification of *subḥān*, except to stress, what Professor Zaehner has implied, that its use is otherwise confined to the Almighty in the Qur'ān and in Muslim religious literature. (Lane, I, 1291, quotes a verse of al-A'shā which is a good instance of the application of *subḥān*, as a synonym of *'ajab*ᵘⁿ, to an admired human being ; but this usage is not relevant to Abū Yazīd's *subḥānī*.)

The discussion of *subḥānī* by Professor L. Massignon [2] renders it superfluous to rehearse arguments which have already long since been put forward well and cogently. The attempt to find a Hindu source for this celebrated *shaṭḥ* seems so unlikely as not to call for further discussion.

A few words need to be added about the phrase translated by Professor Zaehner as 'I am the Lord Most High'. In fact the Arabic is أنا ربّى الأعلى,[3] i.e. 'I am *my* Lord Most High'—a significant difference. Professor Massignon, quoting a different and still unpublished source, gives the saying in the form 'Je suis *votre* Seigneur Suprême' which he correctly identifies with the words put into Pharaoh's mouth in Qur'ān LXXIX, 24.[4] Professor Zaehner, who has apparently overlooked Professor Massignon's citation, consequent upon his own mistranslation has missed the subtle significance of the change made by Abū Yazīd from the Qur'anic '*your* Lord' to '*my* Lord'. The phrase (the Qur'anic echo would certainly not be lost on his auditors and later commentators) is surely just another expression of Abū Yazīd's sense of absolute self-naughting in the ecstatic moment of realizing that only God truly exists.[5]

[1] ibid., 98.

[2] Massignon, *Essai*, 249–51, with literature there quoted. Zaehner's argument that *subḥānī* was the whole of the original saying and that *mā a'ẓama sha'nī* was a later addition, because al-Sarrāj is our earliest source and he only gives *subḥānī*, is somewhat invalidated by the fact that Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, who died only eight years after al-Sarrāj, quotes the saying in its full form (*Qūt al-qulūb*, II, 75).

[3] Zaehner, *HMM*, 98, see al-Sahlajī, 68, 103.

[4] Massignon, *Essai*, 249.

[5] A further examination is necessary of Professor Zaehner's contention (*HMM*, 112) that 'it is quite plain that he (i.e. Abū Yazīd) claimed to be God in all respects' ; the issue is tied up with the interpretation of the Ṣūfī doctrine of *fanā'*, which I hope to re-examine on a future occasion.

3

anta dhāka = tat tvam asi ?

Professor Zaehner cites in support of his Vedāntin thesis the well-known description by Abū Yazīd of his colloquy with God.[1] This is how he translates the narrative[2]:

> Abū Yazīd is reported to have said [Sarrāj tells us]: 'Once [God] raised me up and placed me before him, and said to me: "O Abū Yazīd, verily my creation longs to see thee". And I said: "Adorn me with thy unity and clothe me in thine I-ness and raise me up unto thy oneness, so that when thy creatures see me, they may say: 'We have seen thee (i.e. God) and thou art that'. Yet I (Abū Yazīd) will not be there at all".'

Since this version contains an inaccuracy as a crucial point, it will be convenient to reproduce the original text.

رفعني مرّةً فأقامني بين يديه وقال لي يا أبا يزيد إنّ خلقي يحبّون أن يروك فقلت زيّني بوحدانيتك وألبسني أنانيتك وارفعني إلى أحديتك حتّى إذا رآني خلقك قالوا رأيناك فتكون أنت ذاك ولا أكون هناك.

Professor Zaehner comments: 'Here there is one phrase—"Thou art that"—that is wholly unintelligible in the context. So unintelligible is it indeed that Nicholson, rather than commit himself to writing what seemed to him nonsense, translated: "and that only Thou mayst be there, not I".... The pronoun "that" (*dhāka*), of course, is never used in Arabic to mean "God". If a pronoun is used, it is always *hūwa* [*sic*], "he". Nicholson's mistranslation of the phrase is proof enough that the phrase "Thou art that" in the context is wholly unintelligible. The pronoun "that" (*tat*), however, *is* regularly used in Sanskrit as a synonym for Brahman.... "That", indeed, for the Hindu is the normal way of referring to Brahman as the Absolute, and the phrase *takūnu anta dhāka* is, in fact, a literal translation of the famous phrase of the *Chāndogya* Upaniṣad, *tat tvam asi*...'.[3]

However inadequate Nicholson's version of this narrative may have been, Professor Zaehner is astray if he supposes that he was the first to notice the unusual nature of the phrase *anta dhāka*. I had myself translated it 'Thou wilt be That',[4] but do not claim any originality in doing so; I was merely following the lead given long ago by that great Master of Ṣūfism, Louis Massignon, whose version of the story is as follows[5]:

[1] al-Sarrāj, 382 (p. 461 in the Cairo edition).

[2] Zaehner, *HMM*, 94; cf. *MSP*, 162, where the version is slightly different and at one point more accurate.

[3] Zaehner, *HMM*, 94–5.

[4] *Revelation and reason in Islam*, 95.

[5] *Essai*, 248.

> Il me ravit une fois, et, me plaçant devant Lui, me dit : ' O Aboû Yazîd ! Mes créatures désirent te voir '. Et je Lui dis : ' embellis-moi de Ton unicité, revêts-moi de Ton ipséité et ravis-moi en Ta monéité, afin que, lorsque Tes créatures me verront, elles disent : " Nous T'avons vu ", que Tu sois cela, que je ne sois plus là ! '

In his translation of the crucial passage Professor Zaehner has apparently failed to notice the significance of the particle *fa*, which here as often indicates causality.[1] His version, ' so that when thy creatures see me, they may say : " We have seen thee (i.e. God) and thou art that ". Yet I (Abū Yazīd) will not be there at all ', is therefore incorrect. As Massignon saw, the comment of God's creatures is confined to ' Nous T'avons vu ', and the rest of the narrative reports Abū Yazīd's own concluding response to God.

We come now to the categorical statement that ' the pronoun " that " (*dhāka*), of course, is never used in Arabic to mean " God ". If a pronoun is used, it is always *hūwa*, " he " '. If this assertion were true it would admittedly carry much weight, and lend plausible substance to the equally magisterial ' the phrase *takūnu anta dhāka* is, in fact, a literal translation of . . . *tat tvam asi* '. But the Qur'ān itself establishes precedent for the use of the pronoun *dhā* (this is the basic form, the *-ka* being of course, like variant forms, a particle of ' allocution . . . relating to an object that is distant, or, accord. to general opinion, to that which occupies a middle place between the near and the distant ' [2]) with reference to God. I cite Qur'ān vi, 95 : ذَٰلِكُمُ ٱللَّهُ, a phrase repeated at vi, 102, x, 3, xxxv, 14, xxxix, 8, xl, 64, 66, xlii, 8. There would thus appear to be no lack of evidence for the use in Arabic of the pronoun ' that ' in reference to God. It would appear (whilst noticing the rhetorical rhyme between *dhāka* and *hunāka*, picking up the earlier *ra'aināka*, and observing the balance between this triple rhyme and the triple rhyme *waḥdānīyatika-anānīyataka-aḥadīyatika*), that Abū Yazīd was intending to say no more than that ' that ' which the creatures were seeing (in ' a middle place between the near and the distant ') was God, and that Abū Yazīd had ceased to exist as a contingent entity apart from God. If this interpretation is correct, then there is no need to drag the Sanskrit *tat tvam asi* into the arena.

4

Abū 'Alī al-Sindī

Other instances of Professor Zaehner's confident derivation of phrases credited to Abū Yazīd from Vedāntin sources might be similarly scrutinized, and some measure of their validity reduced.[3] But to do this would involve undue prolongation of this paper, and I will finally invite attention once again

[1] W. Wright, *Arabic grammar*, i, 291 ; Lane, *Lexicon*, i, 2321.
[2] Lane, *Lexicon*, i, 947.
[3] Examples are given on pp. 98–106 of *HMM*.

to the mysterious figure of the man called Abū 'Alī al-Sindī. First I must quote from Professor Zaehner.

> R. A. Nicholson long ago pointed out that Abū Yazīd of Bisṭām might have derived his quite new doctrine of *fanā*, by which he understood the total destruction of the empirical self in God, from his teacher, Abū 'Alī al-Sindī.[1] This view, which was hotly defended by Max Horten, has recently been rejected as not proven by Professor A. J. Arberry.[2] We must, then, once again re-examine the evidence presented both from the Hindu and the Muslim side.
>
> Nicholson maintained that the fact that Abū Yazīd's reputed master was a man from Sind accounted for the doctrines in Abū Yazīd's recorded sayings which seemed to him to be ' certainly ' of Indian origin.[3] Arberry, however, considers that the term ' Sindī ' may refer to a village called Sind in Khorasan which is recorded by the geographer Yāqūt. Theoretically, of course, it might, but it is rather difficult to believe that the Sind referred to is any other than the province of that name. However that may be, it would seem that this Abū 'Alī was a convert to Islam from another religion, for Abū Yazīd says of him : ' I used to keep company with Abū 'Alī al-Sindī and I used to show him how to perform the obligatory duties of Islam, and in exchange he would give me instruction in the divine unity (*tauḥīd*) and in the ultimate truths (*ḥaqā'iq*) '. Abū Yazīd, then, represents himself as learning the ' ultimate truths ' about the divine unity from a man who did not even know how to perform the obligatory duties of a Muslim. It seems, then, fairly clear that this man, Abū 'Alī al-Sindī, was a convert from another faith.[4]

The crucial text here translated by Professor Zaehner is the oft-quoted passage from al-Sarrāj, the Arabic of which is as follows.[5]

وقال أبو يزيد البسطامى رحمه اللّه تعالى صحبت أبا على السندى فكنت ألقّنه ما
ما يقيم به فرضه وكان يعلّمنى التوحيد والحقائق صرفاً.

The phrase translated by Professor Zaehner as ' I used to show him how to perform the obligatory duties of Islam ' has been interpreted by Professor H. Ritter as meaning that Abū Yazīd ' had to teach [al-Sindī] the Ḳur'ān verses necessary for prayer '.[6] This interpretation was doubtless influenced by the brief

[1] R. A. Nicholson, *Mystics of Islam*, 17.

[2] *RRI*, 90. My intention was to suspend judgment pending more substantial proof, rather than to ' reject as not proven '.

[3] *Mystics of Islam*, loc. cit. In his much later *Idea of personality in Ṣūfism*, 27, Nicholson appears to regard Abū Yazīd as introducing Persian, and more specifically Shī'ite, thought into Ṣūfism rather than, as he held formerly, Vedānta.

[4] Zaehner, *HMM*, 93–4.

[5] al-Sarrāj, 177 (p. 235 of the Cairo edition).

[6] *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (new edition), I, 162.

notice of Abū 'Alī al-Sindī, drawn from a still unpublished work of Rūzbihān al-Baqlī,[1] given by Jâmi in his *Nafaḥāt al-uns*, a reference seemingly overlooked by Professor Zaehner.[2]

در شرح شطحیات شیخ روزبهان بقلی آورده است که وی از استادان با یزید است با یزید گوید که من از بو علی علم فنا در توحید می آموختم و ابو علی از من الحمد وقل هو الله.

The words of Abū Yazīd as given by al-Sarrāj are perhaps a little more subtle than Professor Zaehner's translation of them suggests. There seems to be an intended contrast between the *talqīn* of the rites and duties of a Muslim which Abū Yazīd imparted, and the *ta'līm* which he received in return. The verb *laqqana* connotes 'making to understand' according to the lexicons,[3] specifically 'making to understand of a thing that which one had not understood before'. (By Abū Yazīd's time the term *mulaqqin* had hardly yet acquired the specific meaning of 'elementary teacher' which later attached to it,[4] much less the curious office of 'instructor of the dead'[5]; though *talqīn* had already come to denote prompting a dying man to recite the *shahāda*,[6] but this is scarcely relevant.) If Baqlī's version is conflated with that of al-Sarrāj, then perhaps one is justified in speculating that what Abū Yazīd meant was that he instructed (the tense of the verb suggests an extended course of teaching) Abū 'Alī in the exegesis of Sura I and Sura CXII of the Qur'ān; and it is interesting, in view of what Abū 'Alī is said to have taught Abū Yazīd in return, to remember that Sura CXII is sometimes known as the Sura of *Tauḥīd*. (Since the two Suras together run to no more than eleven very short verses, a course of teaching would surely not be required if all that was involved was a parrot-fashion getting by heart so that a new convert might take his place in the ranks of prayer.) Professor Zaehner's presumption that Abū 'Alī came to Abū Yazīd as a convert from another religion is no more than a presumption. My own presumption, which is also no more than a presumption, is that Abū Yazīd took Abū 'Alī, a village Muslim of little or no formal education, through the religious and legalistic meaning of the ritual and common duties of Islam, and to his surprise discovered in his pupil a mastery of the 'real' and mystic apprehension of God. If this guess is right, then Abū 'Alī would belong to a

[1] *Sharḥ al-Shaṭḥiyāt*, an edition of which is promised by Professor H. Corbin; see his *Le Jasmin des fidèles d'amour*, 85. Baqlī died in 606/1209.

[2] Jāmi, *Nafaḥāt al-uns* (Teheran, 1958), 57.

[3] *Lisān al-'Arab*, XVII, 275.

[4] So e.g. Brockelmann, *GAL*, II, 92.

[5] See Lane, *Manners and customs*, 1st ed., II, 302.

[6] Ibn Qutaiba, *'Uyūn al-akhbār*, II, 311; cf. Dozy, *Supplément*, II, 545.

type of simple saint, intuitively privy to the divine secrets, which is by no means uncommon in Ṣūfī hagiography.[1]

[1] Even if it is conceded that Abū 'Alī's *nisba* refers to the province of Sind, this by no means implies that he was originally a Hindu, as will be realized by examining the names of those persons recorded as bearing the *nisba* al-Sindī. Many descendants of the original Arab conquerors of Sind, accomplished by as early as 713, would have called themselves al-Sindī. The traditionist Najīḥ b. 'Abd al-Raḥmān, known as Abū Ma'shar al-Madanī, a client of the Banū Hāshim and said to be of Himyarite stock, was called al-Sindī; he quoted on the authority of, among others, Sa'īd b. al-Musaiyib al-Madanī (d. 94/713), was a favourite of the caliph al-Mahdī, was illiterate for all his pretended learning, and died in 170/787 (see Yāqūt, *Mu'jam al-buldān*, v, 151–2; Ibn Ḥajar, *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, x, 419–22; Ibn al-'Imād, *Shadharāt al-dhahab*, I, 278, who states that he was called al-Sindī as a *laqab bi'l-ḍadd*, being white-skinned). His son Abū 'Abd al-Malik Muḥammad, whom al-Mahdī sent from Medina to Baghdad, was also called al-Madanī al-Sindī (al-Sam'ānī, *Kitāb al-Ansāb*, fol. 314a) though he obviously had no connexion whatever with Sind. The poet Abū 'Aṭā', a panegyrist of both the Umaiyads and the early Abbasids, was called al-Sindī after his father Yasār who was a foreigner and could not speak correct Arabic (see Abu 'l-Faraj, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, XVI, 81–7). The traditionist Abū Muḥammad Rajā' al-Sindī, who died in 221/836, also bore the *nisba* al-Nīsābūrī (see *Tahdhīb al-Tahdhīb*, III, 267) which takes him a long way from Sind; his son and grandson, who followed the same learned profession, also called themselves al-Sindī (*Kitāb al-Ansāb*, fol. 314a). The famous poet and wit Kushājim (d. 360/971), whose proper name was Maḥmūd b. Ḥusain, was also known as al-Sindī after his ancestor al-Sindī b. Sāhak who was bridge-guard at Baghdad during the reign of Hārūn al-Rashīd (al-Sam'ānī, loc. cit.); his immediate provenance was Ramla in Palestine (*Shadharāt al-dhahab*, III, 38). The foregoing examples perhaps suffice to demonstrate how hazardous it is to conclude that a man of Abū Yazīd's period was a native of Sind and a convert from Hinduism because he bore the *nisba* al-Sindī.